

102 wk2 W18

Week 2 1/15-1/19	Begin Unit 1: Biographical Interpretation --Interpreting difficult texts	IRP #1: "A Modest Proposal" IRP #2: "Ariel"
Week 3 1/22-1/25	--Critical Casebook: Flannery O'Connor --Voices & Visions: Sylvia Plath	IRP #3: Ch. 10—O'Connor IRP #4: pp. 737, 882, 1074
Week 4 1/29-2/2	--Critical Casebook: Emily Dickinson --Critical Casebook: Langston Hughes	IRP #5: Ch. 31—Dickinson IRP #6: Ch. 31—Hughes
Week 5 2/5-2/9	--Writing about Literature Begin Unit 2: Sociological Interpretation	Draft of paper #1 due Paper #1 Due

MONDAY:

Prep: IRP#2 handout; copies of class directories to distribute

Due: IRP#1 Swift

Assign: IRP #2 Ariel

Discussion:

1. paraphrase exercise: the challenge of paraphrasing Swift (optional Q. IRP #1)
2. "A Modest Proposal": Before and After [**note:** this is all about *interpretation*]
Before: process general split in responses in IRPs

After: Telling details about Swift's life, times, works
--Then and now, Irish national hero:



--Chief spokesman for Tory party
--Born in Dublin... of English parents
--man of the cloth, dean of St. Patrick's cathedral: "After his death in 1745, he was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral."

--author of Gulliver's Travels, "Tale of the Tub," and other satirical works.

* See below for Britannica bio on Swift

Conclusions: Do these biographical details constitute "proof" of JS's intended meanings?

WEDNESDAY:

Prep: 'Mark Twain Controversy' on the Daily Show [have mp4 backup ready]
<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/9ez59y/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-mark-twain-controversy>

IRP #3 & 4 handout

Due: IRP #2

Assign: IRP #3

Discussion:

1. Difficulty
 - read aloud—does it make a difference, why?
 - the precise nature of the difficulties—specify the barriers to clear communication
 - Note the problem with all poetry: the line breaks (see below) ¹
2. Theories of meaning
 - Clearly communicate your theory
 - Justify (evidence + reasoning)
3. The biographical method
 - Ask the author: *What did you mean when you wrote that?*
 - Failing that, do detective work re: life, times, works—hunt for clues to intention
 - Be selective: we do not require a full life story—focus only on the data points that help us to answer the question "What did she intend to communicate here?"

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¹ DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LINE-BY-LINE AND SENTENCE-BY-SENTENCE

Stasis in darkness. Then the substanceless blue pour of tor and distances. God's lioness, how one we grow, pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow splits and passes, sister to the brown arc of the neck I cannot catch, nigger-eye berries cast dark hooks—black sweet blood mouthfuls, shadows. Something else hauls me through air—thighs, hair; flakes from my heels. White Godiva, I unpeel—dead hands, dead stringencies. And now I foam to wheat, a glitter of seas. The child's cry melts in the wall. And I am the arrow, the dew that flies suicidal, at one with the drive into the red eye, the cauldron of morning.

IRP #2

1. Most readers find this a difficult poem to read & understand—what, specifically, makes it so hard?
 2. Propose, explain and defend a theory about what this poem *means*. Even if you're mystified, do your best. It's perfectly fine to use qualifiers such as "might," "could," "possibly," "seems," and so on.
 3. Optional bonus question: Compose a clear, accurate modern English paraphrase of the entire poem.
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Ariel

Stasis in darkness.
Then the substanceless blue
Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,
How one we grow,
Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to
The brown arc
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye
Berries cast dark
Hooks—

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,
Shadows.
Something else

Hauls me through air—
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Godiva, I unpeel—
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And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.
And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

From Encyclopedia Britannica: “Jonathan Swift”

* **Jonathan Swift**, pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff (born Nov. 30, 1667, [Dublin](#), Ire.—died Oct. 19, 1745, Dublin), Anglo-Irish author, who was the foremost prose satirist in the [English language](#). Besides the celebrated novel *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), he wrote such shorter works as [A Tale of a Tub](#) (1704) and “[A Modest Proposal](#)” (1729).

Early life and education

Swift’s father, Jonathan Swift the elder, was an Englishman who had settled in [Ireland](#) after the Stuart Restoration (1660) and become steward of the King’s Inns, Dublin. In 1664 he married Abigail Erick, who was the daughter of an English clergyman. In the spring of 1667 Jonathan the elder died suddenly, leaving his wife, baby daughter, and an unborn son to the care of his brothers. The younger Jonathan Swift thus grew up fatherless and dependent on the generosity of his uncles. His education was not neglected, however, and at the age of six he was sent to Kilkenny School, then the best in Ireland. In 1682 he entered Trinity College, Dublin, where he was granted his bachelor of arts degree in February 1686 *speciali gratia* (“by special favour”), his degree being a device often used when a student’s record failed, in some minor respect, to conform to the regulations.

Swift continued in residence at Trinity College as a candidate for his master of arts degree until February 1689. But the Roman Catholic disorders that had begun to spread through Dublin after the [Glorious Revolution](#) (1688–89) in Protestant England caused Swift to seek security in England, and he soon became a member of the household of a distant relative of his mother named [Sir William Temple](#), at Moor Park, Surrey. Swift was to remain at Moor Park intermittently until Temple’s death in 1699.

Years at Moor Park

Temple was engaged in writing his memoirs and preparing some of his essays for publication, and he had Swift act as a kind of secretary. During his residence at Moor Park, Swift twice returned to Ireland, and during the second of these visits, he took orders in the Anglican church, being ordained [priest](#) in January 1695. At the end of the same month he was appointed vicar of Kilroot, near Belfast. Swift came to intellectual maturity at Moor Park, with Temple’s rich library at his disposal. Here, too, he met [Esther Johnson](#) (the future Stella), the daughter of Temple’s widowed housekeeper. In 1692, through Temple’s good offices, Swift received the degree of M.A. at the [University of Oxford](#).

Between 1691 and 1694 Swift wrote a number of poems, notably six odes. But his true genius did not find expression until he turned from verse to prose [satire](#) and composed, mostly at Moor Park between 1696 and 1699, [A Tale of a Tub](#), one of his major works.

Published anonymously in 1704, this work was made up of three associated pieces: the *Tale* itself, a satire against “the numerous and gross corruptions in religion and learning”; the mock-heroic “Battle of the Books”; and the “Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit,” which ridiculed the manner of worship and preaching of religious enthusiasts at that period. In the “Battle of the Books,” Swift supports the ancients in the longstanding dispute about the relative merits of ancient versus modern [literature](#) and culture. But *A Tale of a Tub* is the most impressive of the three compositions. This work is outstanding for its exuberance of satiric wit and energy and is marked by an incomparable command of stylistic effects, largely in the nature of parody. Swift saw the realm of culture and literature threatened by zealous pedantry, while religion—which for him meant rational Anglicanism—suffered attack from both Roman Catholicism and the Nonconformist (Dissenting) churches. In the *Tale* he proceeded to trace all these dangers to a single source: the irrationalities that disturb man’s highest faculties—reason and common sense.

Career as satirist, political journalist, and churchman

After Temple’s death in 1699, Swift returned to Dublin as chaplain and secretary to the earl of Berkeley, who was then going to Ireland as a lord justice. During the ensuing years he was in England on some four occasions—in 1701, 1702, 1703, and 1707 to 1709—and won wide recognition in London for his intelligence and his wit as a writer. He had resigned his position as vicar of Kilroot, but early in 1700 he was preferred to several posts in the [Irish](#) church. His public writings of this period show that he kept in close touch with affairs in both Ireland and England. Among them is the [essay](#) “Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome,” in which Swift defended the English constitutional balance of power between the monarchy and the two houses of Parliament as a bulwark against tyranny. In London he became increasingly well known through several works: his religious and political essays; *A Tale of a Tub*; and certain impish works, including the “Bickerstaff” pamphlets of 1708–09, which put an end to the career of John Partridge, a popular astrologer, by first prophesying his death and then describing it in circumstantial detail. Like all Swift’s satirical works, these pamphlets were published anonymously and were exercises in impersonation. Their supposed author was “Isaac Bickerstaff.” For many of the first readers, the very authorship of the satires was a matter for puzzle and speculation. Swift’s works brought him to the attention of a circle of [Whig](#) writers led by [Joseph Addison](#), but Swift was uneasy about many policies of the Whig administration. He was a Whig by birth, education, and political principle, but he was also passionately loyal to the Anglican church, and he came to view with apprehension the Whigs’ growing determination to yield ground to the Nonconformists. He also frequently mimicked and mocked the proponents of “free thinking”: intellectual skeptics who questioned Anglican orthodoxy. A brilliant and still-perplexing example of this is [Argument Against Abolishing Christianity](#) (1708).

A momentous period began for Swift when in 1710 he once again found himself in London. A Tory ministry headed by Robert Harley (later earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (later Viscount Bolingbroke) was replacing that of the Whigs. The new

administration, bent on bringing hostilities with France to a conclusion, was also assuming a more protective attitude toward the Church of England. Swift's reactions to such a rapidly changing world are vividly recorded in his [Journal to Stella](#), a series of letters written between his arrival in England in 1710 and 1713, which he addressed to Esther Johnson and her companion, Rebecca Dingley, who were now living in Dublin. The astute Harley made overtures to Swift and won him over to the Tories. But Swift did not thereby renounce his essentially Whiggish convictions regarding the nature of government. The old Tory theory of the divine right of kings had no claim upon him. The ultimate power, he insisted, derived from the people as a whole and, in the English constitution, had come to be exercised jointly by king, lords, and commons.

Swift quickly became the Tories' chief pamphleteer and political writer and, by the end of October 1710, had taken over the Tory journal, *The Examiner*, which he continued to edit until June 14, 1711. He then began preparing a [pamphlet](#) in support of the Tory drive for peace with France. This, [The Conduct of the Allies](#), appeared on Nov. 27, 1711, some weeks before the motion in favour of a peace was finally carried in Parliament. Swift was rewarded for his services in April 1713 with his appointment as dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

Withdrawal to Ireland

With the death of Queen Anne in August 1714 and the accession of [George I](#), the Tories were a ruined party, and Swift's career in England was at an end. He withdrew to Ireland, where he was to pass most of the remainder of his life. After a period of seclusion in his deanery, Swift gradually regained his energy. He turned again to verse, which he continued to write throughout the 1720s and early '30s, producing the impressive poem "Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift," among others. By 1720 he was also showing a renewed interest in public affairs. In his Irish pamphlets of this period he came to grips with many of the problems, social and economic, then confronting Ireland. His tone and manner varied from direct factual presentation to exhortation, humour, and bitter irony. Swift blamed Ireland's backward state chiefly on the blindness of the English government; but he also insistently called attention to the things that the Irish themselves might do in order to better their lot. Of his Irish writings, the "[Drapier's Letters](#)" (1724–25) and "[A Modest Proposal](#)" are the best known. The first is a series of letters attacking the English government for its scheme to supply Ireland with copper halfpence and farthings. "A Modest Proposal" is a grimly ironic [letter](#) of advice in which a public-spirited citizen suggests that Ireland's overpopulation and dire economic conditions could be alleviated if the babies of poor Irish parents were sold as edible delicacies to be eaten by the rich. Both were published anonymously.

Certain events in Swift's private life must also be mentioned. Stella (Esther Johnson) had continued to live with Rebecca Dingley after moving to Ireland in 1700 or 1701. It has sometimes been asserted that Stella and Swift were secretly married in 1716, but they did not live together, and there is no evidence to support this story. It was friendship that Swift always expressed in speaking of Stella, not romantic love. In addition to the letters that make up his [Journal to Stella](#), he wrote verses to her, including a series of wry and

touching poems titled *On Stella's Birthday*. The question may be asked, was this friendship strained as a result of the appearance in his life of another woman, Esther Vanhomrigh, whom he named Vanessa (and who also appeared in his poetry)? He had met Vanessa during his London visit of 1707–09, and in 1714 she had, despite all his admonitions, insisted on following him to Ireland. Her letters to Swift reveal her passion for him, though at the time of her death in 1723 she had apparently turned against him because he insisted on maintaining a distant attitude toward her. Stella herself died in 1728. Scholars are still much in the dark concerning the precise relationships between these three people, and the various melodramatic theories that have been suggested rest upon no solid ground.

Swift's greatest satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, was published in 1726. It is uncertain when he began this work, but it appears from his correspondence that he was writing in earnest by 1721 and had finished the whole by August 1725. Its success was immediate. Then, and since, it has succeeded in entertaining (and intriguing) all classes of readers. It was completed at a time when he was close to the poet [Alexander Pope](#) and the poet and dramatist [John Gay](#). He had been a fellow member of their [Scriblerus Club](#) since 1713, and through their correspondence, Pope continued to be one of his most important connections to England.

Last years

The closing years of Swift's life have been the subject of some misrepresentation, and stories have been told of his ungovernable temper and lack of self-control. It has been suggested that he was insane. From youth he had suffered from what is now known to have been Ménière's disease, an affliction of the semicircular canals of the ears, causing periods of dizziness and nausea. But his mental powers were in no way affected, and he remained active throughout most of the 1730s—Dublin's foremost citizen and Ireland's great patriot dean. In the autumn of 1739 a great celebration was held in his honour. He had, however, begun to fail physically and later suffered a paralytic stroke, with subsequent aphasia. In 1742 he was declared incapable of caring for himself, and guardians were appointed. After his death in 1745, he was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral. On his memorial tablet is an [epitaph](#) of his own composition, which says that he lies "where savage indignation can no longer tear his heart."

[Gulliver's Travels](#)

Swift's masterpiece was originally published without its author's name under the title *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*. This work, which is told in Gulliver's "own words," is the most brilliant as well as the most bitter and controversial of his satires. In each of its four books the hero, Lemuel Gulliver, embarks on a voyage; but shipwreck or some other hazard usually casts him up on a strange land. Book I takes him to Lilliput, where he wakes to find himself the giant prisoner of the six-inch-high Lilliputians. Man-Mountain, as Gulliver is called, ingratiates himself with the arrogant, self-important Lilliputians when he wades into the sea and captures an invasion fleet

from neighbouring Blefescu; but he falls into disfavour when he puts out a fire in the empress' palace by urinating on it. Learning of a plot to charge him with treason, he escapes from the island.

Book II takes Gulliver to Brobdingnag, where the inhabitants are giants. He is cared for kindly by a nine-year-old girl, Glumdalclitch, but his tiny size exposes him to dangers and indignities, such as getting his head caught in a squalling baby's mouth. Also, the giants' small physical imperfections (such as large pores) are highly visible and disturbing to him. Picked up by an eagle and dropped into the sea, he manages to return home.

In Book III Gulliver visits the floating island of Laputa, whose absent-minded inhabitants are so preoccupied with higher speculations that they are in constant danger of accidental collisions. He visits the Academy of Lagado (a travesty of England's Royal Society), where he finds its lunatic savants engaged in such impractical studies as reducing human excrement to the original food. In Luggnagg he meets the Struldbruggs, a race of immortals, whose eternal senility is brutally described.

Book IV takes Gulliver to the Utopian land of the Houyhnhnms—grave, rational, and virtuous horses. There is also another race on the island, uneasily tolerated and used for menial services by the Houyhnhnms. These are the vicious and physically disgusting Yahoos. Although Gulliver pretends at first not to recognize them, he is forced at last to admit the Yahoos are human beings. He finds perfect happiness with the Houyhnhnms, but as he is only a more advanced Yahoo, he is rejected by them in general assembly and is returned to England, where he finds himself no longer able to tolerate the society of his fellow human beings.

Gulliver's Travels's matter-of-fact style and its air of sober reality confer on it an ironic depth that defeats oversimple explanations. Is it essentially comic, or is it a misanthropic depreciation of mankind? Swift certainly seems to use the various races and societies Gulliver encounters in his travels to satirize many of the errors, follies, and frailties that human beings are prone to. The warlike, disputatious, but essentially trivial Lilliputians in Book I and the deranged, impractical pedants and intellectuals in Book III are shown as imbalanced beings lacking common sense and even decency. The Houyhnhnms, by contrast, are the epitome of reason and virtuous simplicity, but Gulliver's own proud identification with these horses and his subsequent disdain for his fellow humans indicates that he too has become imbalanced, and that human beings are simply incapable of aspiring to the virtuous rationality that Gulliver has glimpsed.

Assessment

Swift's intellectual roots lay in the rationalism that was characteristic of late 17th-century England. This rationalism, with its strong moral sense, its emphasis on common sense, and its distrust of emotionalism, gave him the standards by which he appraised human conduct. At the same time, however, he provided a unique description of reason's weakness and of its use by men and women to delude themselves. His moral principles

are scarcely original; his originality lies rather in the quality of his satiric imagination and his literary art. Swift's literary tone varies from the humorous to the savage, but each of his satiric compositions is marked by concentrated power and directness of impact. His command of a great variety of prose styles is unfailing, as is his power of inventing imaginary episodes and all their accompanying details. Swift rarely speaks in his own person; almost always he states his views by ironic indiscretion through some imagined character like Lemuel Gulliver or the morally obtuse citizen of "A Modest Proposal." Thus Swift's descriptive passages reflect the minds that are describing just as much as the things described. Pulling in different directions, this irony creates the tensions that are characteristic of Swift's best work, and reflects his vision of humanity's ambiguous position between bestiality and reasonableness.